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BLM ALASKA
FRONTIERS
Issue 98 • Winter 2005-2006
News about BLM-managed public lands in Alaska

Alaska firefighters help with Katrina disaster relief

Down on the bayous

Although the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina has left the thoughts of many of us — it is still fresh in the minds of many Alaskans who have provided invaluable assistance in individual assignments or as part of response teams.

"Flying across the affected communities at night was like flying across the ocean," said Alaska Fire Service (AFS) Chief of Fire Training Tony Doty. "There was no sign of those normal things that we associate with everyday life." Doty served in two lower-48 assignments as an assistant area commander for logistics on one of four National Area Command Teams. His first assignment was in Atlanta and the second in Baton Rouge, La.

The Area Command Team provided oversight of Incident Management Teams (IMTs) tasked by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). According to Doty, FEMA directed them to manage base camps in support of responders and to manage the distribution of commodities.

Heading south to the Katrina Hurricane disaster also reminded Doty of an earlier incident. "I was part of a team assigned to assist in the support and recovery after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center," said Doty. "While I saw some pretty horrible things in New York, I would have to say that the biggest difference with Katrina was that society completely deteriorated. Marshall Law was in effect. People were scared and removed from their normal lives."

Chief of Planning, Safety and Training Joe Ribar also served in two disaster recovery assignments. His first was as an area commander with the Louisiana/Texas Area Command for FEMA operations at the Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge. "The only way I have been able to describe it was like standing inside a hen house at the time a fox wanders in," said Ribar. "The noise, the people...it was much more organized than it appeared, but people were overwhelmed trying to get a handle on the magnitude of the disaster."

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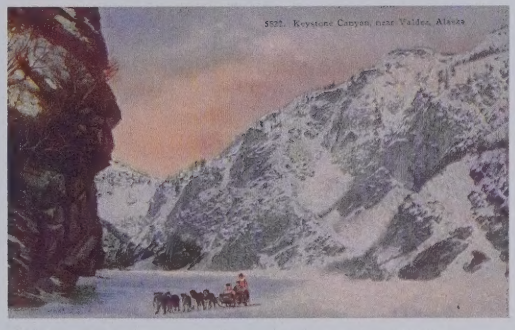
Inside ...



Courtesy of Robert King

Picture postcards from the early 1900s depict the evolution of the trail out of Valdez into the Richardson Highway, now celebrating its 100th anniversary. Story on page 6.

Craig McCaa

Moonlight and northern lights above Eleazar's cabin in the White Mountains National Recreation Area is just one of many winter delights in Alaska. Explore The Wonder of White, page 8.

BLM Alaska

Katrina Help

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Ribar's other assignment was with the Mississippi Area Command operating out of Foley, Ala. "The team interacted very effectively with the wildland fire teams in the field," said Ribar.

For AFS Training Operations Manager Lynn Standley Coe, the road south began when the Alaska Type 1 IMT deployed to Boise, Idaho, on Sept. 3. "We were staged for a day prior to receiving our mission assignment from FEMA," said Coe, who served as the team's finance section chief. "We then flew to Marietta, Ga., for an in-briefing which resulted in our team of 33 being split into different branches with each going to a different state (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, or Maryland) for a trailer staging mission," said Coe who returned to Alaska on Oct. 4.

AFS Safety and Occupational Health Specialist Jon Thomas said his first impression of the ravaged area was similar to scenes shown by the media. Thomas was a communications unit leader assigned to a Type 3 IMT at the responder base camp in Vancleave, Miss. "The greatest service the team provided was a safe, clean place to get sleep, good food, showers and internet access," said Thomas.

Since Alaskans first responded to requests to support the disaster, 258 people have filled 498 requests according to Lauren Barber of the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center. These numbers include people assigned outside Alaska who were reassigned or who served in subsequent assignments.

According to Tony Doty, when asked why Alaska Fire Service personnel where given tasks that might have been assigned to others, FEMA representatives typically responded "because you fire guys know how to get it done."

— Kevin L. McIver

ANILCA marks silver anniversary

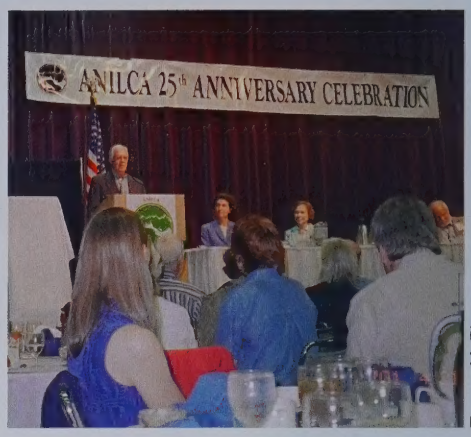
Dec. 2 marked the 25th anniversary of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act or ANILCA for short. This legislation had a huge impact on the state and BLM.

Congress transferred millions of acres of BLM-managed public lands in Alaska to the Fish and Wildlife Service to create nine new refuges and expand six others. Other land was transferred to the Forest Service to expand the Tongass and Chugach national forests. The National Park Service received land to expand the boundaries of Denali National Park and two others and to manage ten new parks such as Kenai Fjords and Gates of the Arctic. Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, at 11 million acres, was created entirely from BLM-managed public lands and instantly became the largest national park in the United States.

While BLM "lost" some if its most scenic lands, the agency was given Congressional direction to manage the one-million acre Steese National Conservation Area and six new components of the national wild and scenic river system. It also was given management authority for the White Mountains National Recreation Area, the only NRA in BLM. Today BLM still manages more land in Alaska than any other federal agency.

But ANILCA went far beyond setting boundaries on maps. Other sections spelled out federal policies for oil and gas regulations on the North Slope; established the mineral assessment program, interagency visitor centers and the Alaska Land Use Council; and gave direction to programs for submerged lands, Native allotments, state selections, subsistence, wilderness, and mining. An entire section was devoted to issues related to various Alaska Native corporations.

But one contentious issue couldn't be resolved: whether or not to allow oil and gas exploration on the Arctic Coastal Plain in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Twenty-five years later, that debate continues.



Teresa McPherson

Last July, former President Jimmy Carter was a keynote speaker at a week-long symposium exploring the ramifications of the historic legislation that changed the face of Alaska forever.

Alaska miner wins national award

In September, BLM recognized Alaska miner "Diamond Jim" Olmstead with the agency's 2005 National Sustainable Mineral Development Award in the Small Operator Category.

Olmstead has been mining gold on Gold Creek since 1996 where his one-person summer operation has progressed from a suction dredge to a small Case 450 tractor. The award recognizes his conscientious and timely reclamation that has maintained a stable channel and flood plain on the creek. Disturbances are limited to about one acre a year.

Local BLM staff at the Fairbanks District Office are particularly impressed with the way Olmstead replicates the original stream channel, matching existing grade and channel widths to adjacent undisturbed areas as his operations move along. Olmestead also stockpiles organic and vegetative material from the site for re-spreading later, speeding up the revegetation of the disturbed areas.

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Scouting for Seeds

Randy Meyers' chief claim to fame may be that she is the entire staff at BLM's northernmost, western most, and possibly most obscure office — Kotzebue, Alaska. And while her duties vary, one of her favorites is participating in a little-publicized effort to ensure plants will always be available to help sustain life in a rapidly changing world.

A botanist by training, Meyers is BLM-Alaska's lead for Seeds of Success, an interagency program coordinated through the Plant Conservation Alliance (PCA) that supports and coordinates seed collection of native plants in the United States. The purpose is to increase the number of species and the amount of native seed that is available to help stabilize, rehabilitate and restore land affected by environmental factors or human activity.

Seeds of Success also provides seed quality and germination information critical to the development of new native plants through a partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, England, and opportunities for federal agencies to work with seed growers in local communities.

"BLM was the first agency contacted by Kew," says Meyers, "and we started collecting for them on public lands throughout the West." Now the program is rapidly expanding with other partners in Texas, the Midwest, and the East. All partners who collect seed for the program coordinate and share information with the PCA.

Currently more than 500 species have been collected for the United States and 84 of those are found in Alaska. There are about 1,500 species plants native to Alaska.

Susan Steinacher

Randy Meyers evaluates a potential collection site for Chukchi primrose on a lichen granite slope of Bendeleben Mountain, Seward Peninsula.

In 2000, Kew launched an ambitious expansion of their collection program with the Millennium Seed Bank Project (see page 5). BLM-Alaska and Meyers are part of the effort.

Each fall she visits a number of locations with her collecting kit: cloth bags, clippers, berry bucket, field notebook, hand lens and calculator. But there's a lot more to the story than just showing up to grab whatever can be found.

It begins in the winter. "You must have a plan. Just what are you going to collect and where?" says Meyers. She draws up a list of potential species based on previous projects, then she reviews a national database so not to duplicate something already collected. BLM-Alaska selects about 20 target species a year.

Meyers confesses that since she usually does a lot of the collecting, she has to think about practical things "like how big the seed is, how many seeds are on a plant, or how hard it will be to find late in

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Scouting for Seeds

—continued from page 3

Susan Steinacher

BLM botanists may have discovered a new species of wallflower in the Sinuk River uplands near Nome. The UAF hebarium is sending specimens to international experts in the mustard family to get opinions on how to classify it.

Susan Steinacher

A fruiting stem of nakedstem wallflower *(Parrya nudicaulis)* blooms in the early spring on moist sandy slopes; its conspicuous lavender flowers smell somewhat like lilacs.

Plant illustrations from: USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. Illustrated flora for the northern states and Canada. Vol. 2:348.

the fall when the leaves are withered or gone." Is the plant small to begin with? Does it occur in a big population or is it scarce even in the right habitat? Constant kneeling and stooping are involved and often there is extensive hiking. It can take one or two days to get a single batch of 10,000 seeds per species required by Kew.

Then there is site reconnaissance. It is important to go out and evaluate potential collection locations. What's growing where? Will there be enough plants to produce enough seeds to collect later?

If the site looks promising, Meyers will collect voucher specimens. The idea is to collect a plant in flower right then or collect it later when it has mature fruit. The plants are flattened and temporarily stored in a plant press, then kept in a warm, dry location. The voucher specimens and data sheets are sent to Kew Gardens where herbarium personnel verify the species identification and mount the plants on stiff, archival quality paper. This creates a permanent, labeled herbarium specimen.

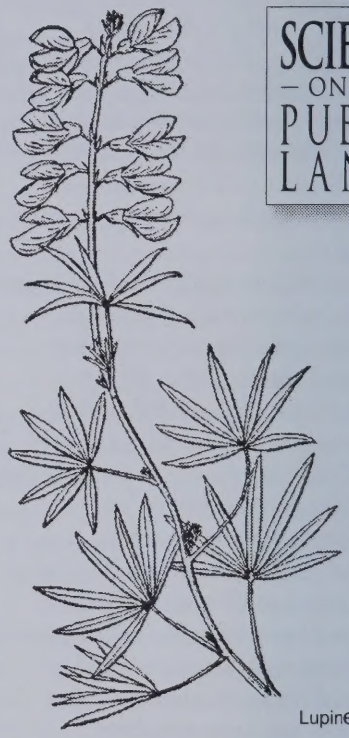
"I'll try to return in mid-August to estimate when the seeds will be mature enough to collect," says Meyers.

Finally the shorter, colder days of fall arrive and it's time to see if everything will fall into place. Will there be enough seeds? Will there be any seeds at all?

Sometimes the plants don't set seed because of a late spring cold snap or because the summer was too hot or too windy or too rainy. Or, the seed might be blighted by disease or be moldy or even be infested with insects.

"This year I was about three weeks too late in the season. One species never set seed. Three other species had already dispersed them. So the 2005 seed collections were among the lower tallies for our four years of collecting. However,

SCIENCE — ON THE — PUBLIC LANDS



Lupine

Vegetation around the Squirrel River is classified as moist tundra, alpine tundra, or spruce-poplar forest.

Susan Steinacher

Bering Sea wormwood
Artemisia senjavinensis

we have collected an average of 21 species per year for the BLM-Alaska collections. Two other volunteers also encountered various problems this year and had nothing to show for their planning. It was very disappointing," says Meyers.

But sometimes all goes well.

Meyers says the best time to collect is when it's dry, but you have to go with the conditions. If the seeds are bagged wet, she will spread them out to dry as soon as possible, removing extraneous leaves and stems to speed up the drying process. She will also remove any insects. When the seed is dry, she transfers it into cloth bags, labels them with the collection number and date and ships them to Kew.

"When we collect, we always want to leave enough seed so the plants can continue to reseed naturally. Our collection protocol directs us to collect no more than 20 percent of the viable seed available," says Meyers.

Seeds should come from more than 100 different plants to assure genetic diversity. Meyers also uses a data sheet developed for the Seeds of Success project to describe details of the collection site and target plant species including habitat and soil characteristics, associated plants, approximate number of target plants present and number sampled, and an assessment of seed dispersal stage and quality.

"It's one of my favorite projects. Working on it feels like real botany. This small program is a real contribution to an international effort to preserve plant diversity. And it's a chance to enhance local restoration efforts," says Meyers. Kew will clean the seed, do germination tests, and then send half back to the host country. Alaska seed is stored either at a U.S. Forest Service facility in Bend, Ore., or at the Western Region Plant Introduction Station in Pullman, Wash.

Plant seeds are a valuable tool for BLM to manage the public lands. Knowing what species are appropriate for a given location can help a site recover from a wildfire or other surface disturbances such as mining, grazing or even recreation.

As for the future, Meyers says she's going to make a big effort to mentor more people and get them ready to collect next year. "One of my dreams is to go to Kew, England, to see how they process our seeds and store them. It's world-class, state-of-the-art technology. And of course I would love to see the Royal Botanic Gardens while I'm there."

—Edward Bovy

Collection Priorities

- Alaska endemic species (species found primarily in Alaska although a few might be found nearby in Yukon or Siberian border areas)
- Alaska native species related to weeds (cross breeding could help eradicate a weed)
- plants with potential for revegetation (These are native species that are good colonizers and grow rapidly to fill in an area.)
- species important to wildlife or Native people

Kamchatka rhododendron

Millennium Seed Bank

The Millennium Seed Bank Project is an international plant conservation initiative at the Royal Botannic Gardens, Kew, England, aimed at safeguarding 10 percent (24,000) of the world's seed-bearing plant species against extinction.

Efforts now focus on the International Program to collaborate with local and national organizations to collect seeds from arid and semi-arid lands around the world. These lands cover a third of the earth's land surface, including many of the world's poorest countries, but support almost one fifth of its population.

The most immediate threat to dryland areas is desertification due to intensive human settlement in areas subject to drought. Scientists must have access to genetic diversity to help bring forth new varieties that can resist pests, diseases and environmental stresses.

By 2002, Kew had surpassed 900 species in the program—and at 10,000 seeds per species, that's more than 9 million seeds processed.

Learn More

Seeds of Success
www.nps.gov/plants/sos/

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
www.rbgkew.org.uk

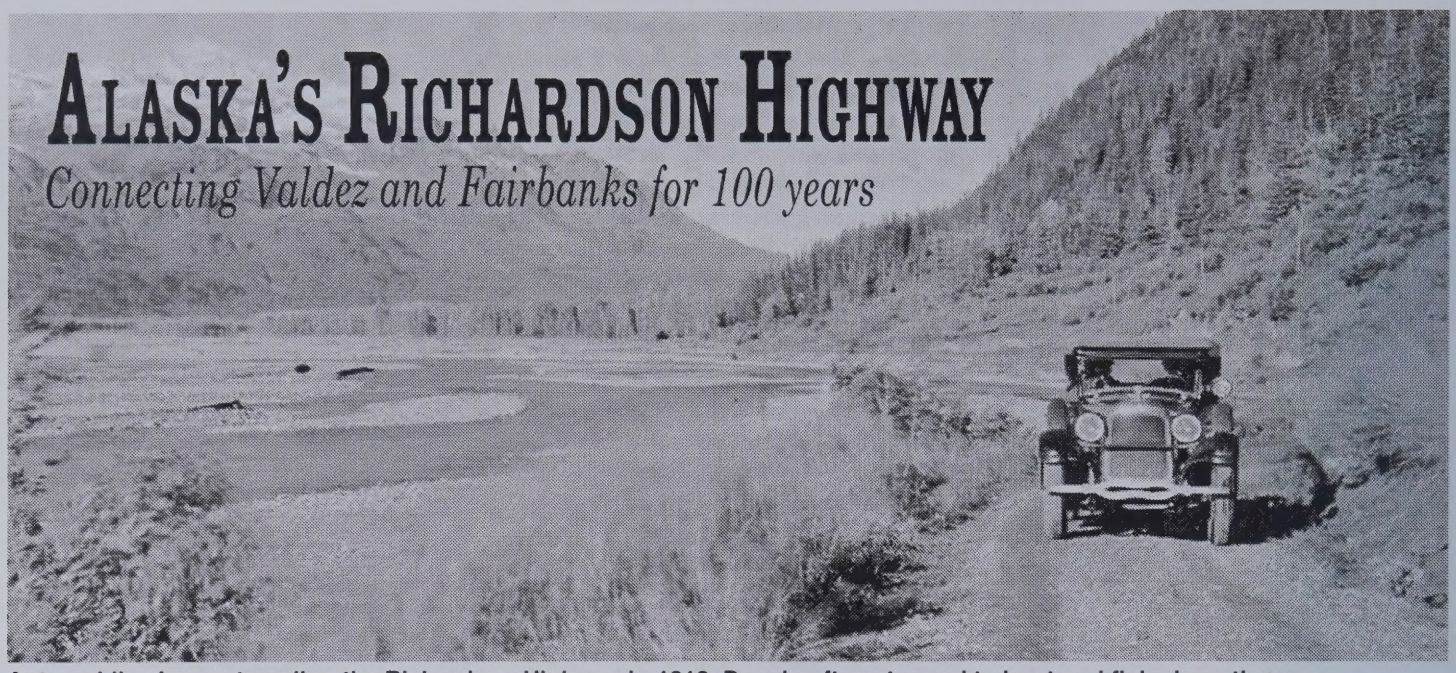
Millennium Seed Bank Program
www.kew.org/msbp/

Alaska Natural Heritage Program
www.aknhp.uaa.alaska.edu/

Alaska Native Plant Society
www.aknps.org

Alaska's Richardson Highway

Connecting Valdez and Fairbanks for 100 years



Automobiles began traveling the Richardson Highway in 1913. People often stopped to hunt and fish along the way.

In 1905, Congress passed the Nelson Act which would have far-reaching consequences for Alaska. A key purpose of the legislation was to promote the construction of roads and trails to benefit mining, trade, agricultural and manufacturing developments. The legislation created both a steady funding mechanism and also a proactive oversight board to direct the work. The new law also required that 70 percent of all funds collected from license fees in Alaska, outside of incorporated towns, were to be used for road building.

Equally important, the Nelson Act created a three-member board of road commissioners with responsibility to actively plan, create, upgrade, and maintain roads and trails. By law, its membership included "an engineer officer of the United States Army to be detailed and appointed by the Secretary of War." The choice was Maj. Wilds Preston Richardson (1861-1929), a West Point graduate who had previously supervised construction of Army posts in the Alaska Territory beginning in 1897. Richardson would serve in his new post as the first President of the Alaska Road Commission from 1905 to 1917.

By 1915, under Richardson's tireless leadership, crews had constructed 2,216 miles of trails, 902 miles of wagon roads and 577 miles of sled roads in Alaska. While most were primitive by today's standards, many were later improved. Among the most important was the establishment of what is known today as the Richardson Highway, Alaska's first highway, later named in honor of Maj. Richardson.

Under the leadership of Wilds P. Richardson, Alaska's territorial roads and trails expanded dramatically. Richardson left the Alaska Road Commission in 1917 to serve in World War I. He died in 1929 and is buried at West Point.

This amazing feat of construction, began with animal-powered machinery to supplement hand work, connected coastal Valdez with the booming gold rush camp of Fairbanks. When completed, it spanned more than 360 miles of difficult terrain including two major mountain ranges as well as permafrost soils and swampy bogs that still challenge Alaskan road builders today. While 1905 marked its initial transformation into becoming today's Richardson Highway, the road's origin dates back to the late 19th century.

In the early spring of 1899, the U.S. Army began cutting a 5-foot-wide pack trail out of the gold rush boomtown of Valdez to the gold fields of the Klondike. By the end of the summer of 1899, about 40 miles had been completed and another 53 miles surveyed and cleared. The following year, the military began building a telegraph line connecting Valdez to the newly established Fort Egbert at Eagle on the Yukon River near the Canadian border. Consequently, the primitive pack trail was also improved in many locations.

Two unexpected developments caused a change in the destination for the Valdez-to-Eagle trail — the discovery of gold in the Fairbanks region in 1902 and the further decline of the Klondike gold rush. Rather than proceed toward Eagle and the Klondike, the trail was redirected to Fairbanks. To serve the increasing number of travelers, various entrepreneurs built road-

Historical Fact

Before 1905, Alaska had very few roads. One estimate is that fewer than 10 miles of roads existed in the entire territory at the start of the Klondike Gold Rush of the late 1890s.

houses along the way. One of the earliest was the Sourdough roadhouse which was built in 1903 and stood near BLM's Sourdough Campground until the roadhouse burned in late 1992.

After passage of the Nelson Act in 1905, work on the Valdez-to-Fairbanks Trail increased dramatically. By 1907, a winter sled road to Fairbanks was completed, followed by a wagon road in 1910. By 1913, enough additional improvements were made that motorized vehicles could make the trip. Alaska businessman and later politician Robert E. Sheldon (1883-1983) drove the first automobile over the highway in the summer of 1913. For several years after that, he operated an "auto stage" hauling passengers up and down the highway between Valdez and Fairbanks. In the 1920s, the trips sometimes included requested stops so passengers could fish and hunt during the two-to three-day ride.

The old Sourdough Roadhouse was one of the earliest facilities built to aid travelers along the trail north out of Valdez. It began in 1903 and stood near BLM's Sourdough Creek Campground until burning Dec. 27, 1992.

Historical Fact

The development of the Richardson Highway in the first decades of the 20th century is all the more remarkable when viewed in comparison to what was occurring in the Lower 48 States. No highway system existed linking the east and west coasts, with the first successful trip by car between the two coasts done in 1903 requiring many months to accomplish.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Richardson Highway was used so extensively by truckers that in 1933, tolls were temporarily placed on commercial vehicles as a way to encourage more shipping by railroad. In the 1940s, new roads were completed leading to connections off the Richardson Highway to Anchorage (via the Glenn Highway), and the Lower 48 (via the Alaska Highway and Tok Cutoff). By 1957, the Richardson Highway was hard-surfaced and maintenance and improvement projects continue to this day. Now, 100 years and counting after the passage of the Nelson Act, we can take pride in celebrating the centennial of today's Richardson Highway, a most remarkable achievement.

—Robert King

Primitive pack trails were expanded, allowing travel by horse-drawn wagons and later by automobiles. Travel time between Valdez and Fairbanks was dramatically shortened.

Historic photos courtesy of Robert King, personal collection

The Wonder of White

Those who live in Interior Alaska are used to the wintertime ribbing from residents of Anchorage and other balmy parts of the state. "How cold is it today — 80 below zero?" "Got square tires again?" "Seen the sun lately?"

What residents already know, and what an increasing number of tourists are finding out, is that those most renewable of Interior resources – cold and dark – provide more than its famous low temperatures and short days. They also offer the dark, clear nights and reliable snow cover that make for unparalleled recreational opportunities.

Occupying more months on the calendar than the short, frenetic summer, winter in the Interior offers an impressive array of opportunities – from overnight trips by ski, dog-sled, or snow-machine to world-class ice sculpting contests and ice fishing. For many visitors, a chance to view the shimmering northern lights, perhaps while sitting in one of the area's cozy hot springs, is the highlight of their entire trip.

Edward Bovy

Blackened but still White Mountains

One of the Interior's crown jewels of winter recreation, BLM's White Mountains National Recreation Area features more than 200 miles of groomed winter trails and 10 public use cabins.

The area took some hard hits from the last two summers of wildfires, which burned approximately 88 miles of trail and destroyed the Wolf Run and Crowberry cabins and a wooden bridge.

More ecologically minded visitors realize that, in addition to charring forests, wildfires also spur new vegetative growth and create valuable wildlife habitat. On a purely practical note, last summer's wildfires produced a veritable sea of easily-available firewood around some White Mountains cabins.

Late last summer, firefighting crews began the lengthy job of clearing downed trees from burned sections of trail. The trails are now open for travel, although visitors should watch for fallen trees. As for the burned cabins, materials for one replacement cabin couldn't be transported to the site because, ironically, the helicopter was diverted to firefighting duty.

Dog mushing is not just for professionals. An i tours and "musher schools" for the general pu

"That cabin is ready to go," says outdoor recreation planner Eric Yeager. "As soon as the snow is gone, we can get in there and build it." If helicopters are more available next summer, Yeager says BLM may even replace both cabins before the snow falls next year.

The new cabins are partly funded by cabin rental fees collected under Recreation Fee Demonstration Program and also by money earmarked in the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) program.

Growing demand

The White Mountains' popularity with locals and visitors alike stems from its proximity to Fairbanks, its stellar access to stunning scenery, and its trail-connected system of public use cabins. After a long day on

Edward Bovy

easing number of people are offering custom

the trail, nothing beats unwinding in a warm cabin with the northern lights dancing overhead.

As Fairbanks and nearby communities grow, the facilities in the White Mountains NRA are becoming more popular. Lee's Cabin, only seven miles from the Elliott Highway, is by far the most popular cabin and is now reserved approximately 125 nights per year.

Getting a weekend reservation at Lee's Cabin, or at any White Mountains cabin for three-day weekends or spring break, requires tenacity, says Kenita Stenroos, who takes cabin reservations for the Fairbanks District Office.

Cabins may be rented by telephone or in person up to 30 days in advance. Exactly 30 days before desirable rental dates, people pounce on their favorite cabin. "The phone is ringing when we get here at 7:45 in the morning," she says. Each year she turns away more people because the cabins are already booked.

Outdoor recreation planner Collin Cogley says comments in the cabin logbooks show a clear interest in additional cabins and trails.

Stenroos echoes that view. "They want more cabins, and more that are closer to the road," she says. "It's a long way to go 35 miles on skis in a day."

Are more cabins and trails in the White Mountains' future? Developing new facilities depends on having the funds to construct, operate and maintain them, Cogley says. "We're busy updating the Resource Management Plan for the White Mountains, but when we finish, we'll take a look at the idea of more cabins."

Public use cabins are also available by reservation in the Chena River State Recreation Area, managed by the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. Two cabins off Chena Hot Springs Road, make them convenient for those without the desire or gear for a long backcountry trek. Five other cabins are within seven miles of the road.

Both the BLM and state cabin and trail systems provide access across frozen bogs, streams and rivers that are difficult if not impossible to traverse during the summer. Thus, they offer an unparalleled opportunity to experience the quiet magic of the Interior's boreal forest and its wild inhabitants.

Beyond the White Mountains

The desire to get off the road and experience the 'real Alaska' has led several private enterprises to cater to a winter version of adventure travel. Some businesses specialize in dog-mushing while others provide a warm place to sleep as well as groomed trails for self-propelled outdoor fun.

One such place, the 1st Alaska Outdoor School, offers visitors both "adventure and the skills of remote living in Alaska," according to its web site. Owners Ralf and Rico Dobrovolny are adding winter tours to round out the summer offerings at their remote lodge on the Chatanika River northwest of Fairbanks. Visitors either ski or dog mush 7 miles from the nearest road to the site or they catch a ride on a sled towed behind a snowmachine.

This winter the Dobrovolnys are concentrating on providing day trips for tourists but also offering snowshoeing and dog-mushing. "We show them how we do ice fishing, how we get water from the river, basically how we live out there," Ralf Dobrovolny says. The pair plans on opening a 16-bed hostel that will be available to overnight guests by next winter.

For those seeking a respite for trail-tested muscles, a soak in one of the local hot springs will certainly fit the bill. Chena Hot Springs, approximately 60 miles northeast of Fairbanks, is a full-service resort that handles the lion's share of organized tour groups. It also remains popular with locals, especially since

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Craig McCaa

Snowshoeing over Wickersham Dome in the White Mountains.

Craig McCaa

Wonder of White

—continued from page 9

the indefinite closure of the Arctic Circle Hot Springs near Central.

Those seeking a quieter, more private setting might consider Tolovana Hot Springs, located 11 miles down a trail off the Elliott Highway. Available by reservation only, the hot springs includes two cabins situated a short hike from the springs. Water comes out of the ground between 125 and 145 degrees, and mixed with icy creek water, makes for the perfect soak.

Tom DeLong, who runs the hot springs under a BLM lease, says his customers are mostly locals who arrive by ski, snowshoe, dogteam or snowmachine. "They like the trail adventure. Eleven miles is just right – it's pretty strenuous, but not undoable."

Japanese winter tourism doubles

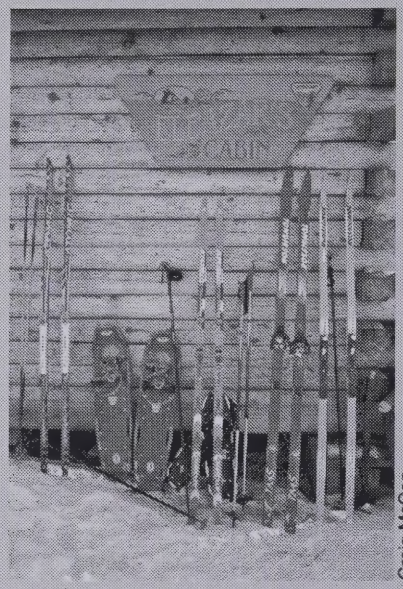
Although locals have long made Interior winters a time for fun and adventure, word has been slower to reach potential visitors outside Alaska. That may be changing. Deb Hickok, president and CEO of the Fairbanks Convention & Visitors Bureau, is encouraged by increased media coverage of the Interior's winter tourist attractions.

"From ice sculptures in the *Seattle Times* to northern lights coverage in other major newspapers...That's an indication of interest. Now, how that translates into people visiting – that's hard to say."

Anecdotally, though, local businesses tell her they're getting more winter visitors. "When these stories appear, they get responses," she says.

In particular, much of the increase in winter tourism appears to be fueled by more visitors from Japan. Hickok says Japan Airlines' direct charter flights from Tokyo to Fairbanks, begun last year, are making a big impact.

Last year JAL sent three flights, which were 98 percent booked. The 895 visitors on these flights contrib



Craig McCaa

Cabin Information

BLM's public use cabins in the White Mountains National Recreation Area may be rented in person at the BLM office at 1150 University Ave, Fairbanks or by telephone at 907-474-2251. http://www.ak.blm.gov/white mountains

The Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation maintains winter trails and rents public use cabins in the Chena River State Recreation Area and at other locations. See this web site for cabin availability and rental information: http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/cabins/north.htm

BLM and state lands near Paxson, Summit Lake, Cantwell and along the Denali Highway are popular locations for snowmachine trips.

uted about $1 million to the local economy, according to the Travel Industry Association of America. This year JAL is upping the number to seven 747s.

The Alaska Travel Industry Association says most Japanese visitors stay for four nights and aurora viewing is their main interest. Fairbanks is one of the world's premier places for viewing the aurora borealis due to its high latitude and clear nights.

Jim Winslow, owner of Alaskan Arctic Turtle Tours, runs sightseeing tours year-round on the Dalton Highway and other Interior roads. He was quick to see the local benefits of the new winter flights which previously had been slow months for tourism. "It was a big boost last year. February was great! [Japanese visitors] want to experience 40 below and the northern lights."

On Cleary Summit outside Fairbanks, Mok Kumagai and his partner have a business offering just that experience. Their Aurora Borealis Lodge features big windows facing north, for those who prefer to enjoy the aurora from indoors with a cup of tea or hot chocolate in hand.

"Nice sofas and nice atmosphere – that's our niche," says Kumagai, who is originally from Japan. Last winter roughly half of his customers arrived in Fairbanks on the JAL charter flights.

The rapid rise in winter visitors has delighted many in the tourism business. When Hickok started heavier promotion of winter tourism six years ago, it looked like an uphill climb, she says. "Now that we've seen results, there's more confidence that we can become a year-round destination," she says. "But we've got a long way to go."

As Hickok and others entice more visitors to discover the Interior's winter charms, they can at least take solace in the bedrock foundation – cold, snow, darkness – upon which their endeavors depend. Winter is here.

— Craig McCaa

Craig McCaa

Groomed trails beckon mushers to BLM's Campbell Tract in Anchorage and the White Mountains NRA near Fairbanks.

Winter City Fun

Every winter, BLM's Campbell Tract in Anchorage transforms itself into a winter playground. Some of the city's coldest temperatures keep the snow soft and fluffy, decorating the black spruce and birch forest and creating a winter wonderland for skiers and dog mushers alike.

"It's quite typical any day of the week to see vehicles park at our trailheads, see skiers get out and strap on their skis and head out during their lunch break or on the way home from work. Urban recreationists seem to find creative ways to weave time in the outdoors into their daily routines," says BLM outdoor recreation planner Brad Muir.

Dog mushers love the extensive series of trails for their exclusive use on the tract. "Dog teams run extremely fast and silent. It's difficult to stop an entire team in a short space, so it's essential for dog teams to operate separately from other recreationists," says outdoor recreation planner Doug Ballou.

Portions of Campbell Tract are used by the Tour of Anchorage, a nationally-known cross-country ski race. And in recent years, the Tract has had some of the better late-winter snow conditions in the city, enticing the Iditarod to relocate the end of the ceremonial start there.

Campbell Tract trails connect and continue on to land managed by the Municipality of Anchorage in the Far North Bicentennial Park, making for an exceptional winter recreational experience.

Planning is under way for the Third Annual Winter Trails Day on Feb. 11 at the BLM Campbell Creek Science Center and Campbell Tract. Last year more than 200 Anchorage residents attended this annual event to learn about winter sports and recreation and even "test drive" new gear provided by BLM's Winter Trails Day partner, REI. Indoor and outdoor winter activities will provide fun for people of all ages. For more information, contact the Campbell Creek Science Center at 267-1247.

BLM helps preserve historic schoolhouse

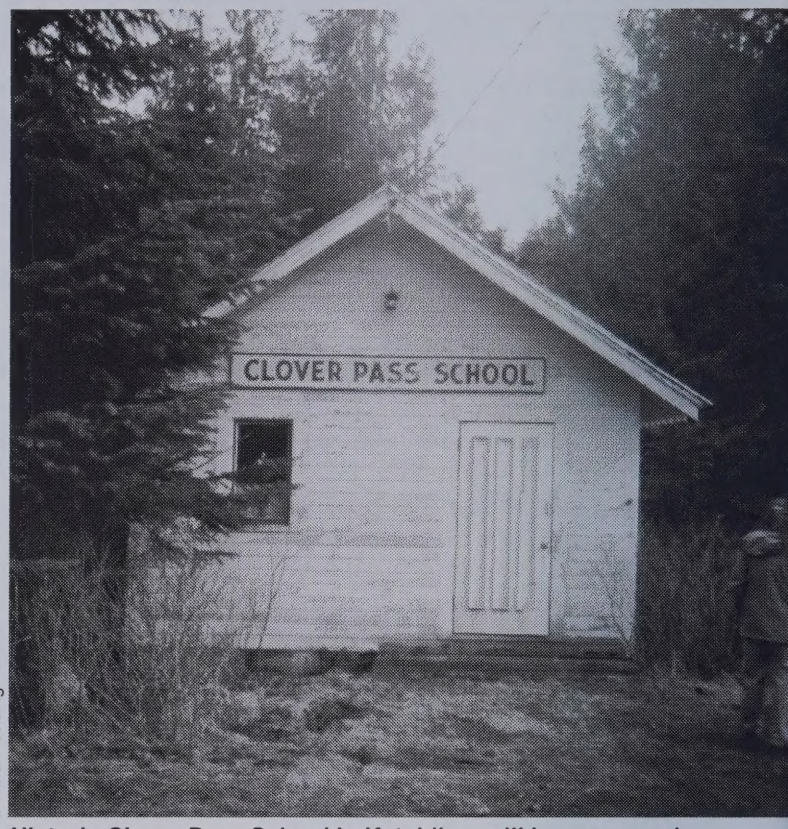
The BLM Anchorage Field Office, University of Alaska, Ketchikan Gateway Borough and Historic Ketchikan, Inc. joined focuses to provide local management of the historic Clover Pass School in Southeast Alaska.

The schoolhouse was formally listed on the National Register of Historic Places this summer. Historic Ketchikan, Inc. owns the schoolhouse and BLM manages the land where the schoolhouse is located. The University of Alaska recently agreed to relinquish its interest in the lands (which were previously selected by the University Lands Office under the Alaska Statehood Act) so BLM could transfer management of Clover Pass School to the Ketchikan Gateway Borough. Historic Ketchikan, Inc. will manage and maintain the schoolhouse on land to be managed by the Borough.

This cooperative solution allowed all parties to respond to the needs of the local community to help preserve this historic resource.

The Clover Pass Community School is significant because it represents the final remaining school from a period when Ketchikan's far-flung "neighborhoods" had their own schools and community halls. The 25 homesite families in the area built the school in 1947 due to the remoteness of the Clover Pass Community prior to statehood (which led to road improvements and later to the creation of the centralized Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District).

After the district was created in the early 1960s, Clover Pass residents wanted to maintain their "local" school, but a decision was made to bus the students into the Ketchikan each day. After the school closed, area residents used the building as a community center, polling place, summer library and for other community events such as weddings and dances. The building retains its integrity of location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling and association.



Donna Redding

Historic Clover Pass School in Ketchikan will be preserved through cooperative efforts of federal, state, and local government.

BLM backs university program for Alaska Native surveyors

When field survey branch chief Dan Johnson wondered what could be done to recruit Alaska Natives into BLM surveying positions across the state, he found his answer in a University of Alaska Anchorage program that the agency now supports financially.

The Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program targets Alaska Native high school students in villages, prepares them for UAA and focuses on retaining those students by fostering a community environment. More than 70 percent of all students who have participated in the nine-year old program have graduated with a bachelor's degree in engineering or science or are still enrolled in university science degree programs. ANSEP historically primed engineering students, but since the arrival of BLM funds, the program also encourages surveying.

BLM's Cadastral Survey division gave $50,000 to ANSEP in 2005 and budgeted for $50,000 more in 2006. The assistance agreement with UAA is similar to other arrangements in the Lower 48 that target opportunities to develop the future workforce, but instead of funding professors to teach surveying classes like some BLM offices do, ANSEP uses the funds to recruit potential surveyors.

"We're hoping some of these students consider working for the BLM," says John Sroufe, who heads up the agency's Cadastral Survey division at the Alaska State Office in Anchorage. "We would also benefit if they ended up with private surveying firms that we would be contracting with. These young people are getting involved in issues that affect their own lands. Their cultural knowledge paired with a surveying degree would tremendously benefit the land conveyance process."

For more information on ANSEP, go to http://www.engr.uaa.alaska.edu/ansep/ or contact Herb Schroeder by phone (907) 786-1680 or email herb@uaa.alaska.edu.

— Wendy Longtin

Petroleum reserve goes solar!

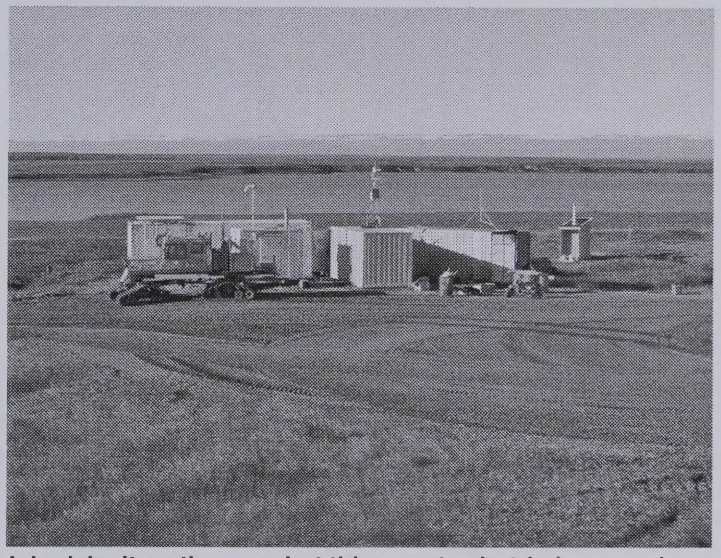
Innovative BLMer uses alternative energy in search for oil

Few Alaskans have ever heard of Inigok. It's just a small collection of structures clustered at a windy, remote airstrip about 120 miles southeast of Barrow in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. The site, dating back to 1978 when a gravel pad was constructed for a test well, has assumed increasing importance as a refueling stop and "spike camp" for industry and government workers involved in exploring for oil beyond the outer edge of infrastructure support.

BLM stores supplies and equipment in three Conex steel-walled containers brought to the site as a makeshift warehouse and shop for servicing equipment. Workers sleep in tents nearby. Power to charge batteries and run lights used to be supplied by a traditional gasoline generator. But Don Meares, a BLM natural resource specialist who had been doing a lot of research on alternative energy for a remote cabin he owns near Homer, noticed that Inigok has at least two things going for it: lots of sunshine and wind.

In 2003, he installed solar panels and a wind generator. "We weren't sure it would work. But when the wind stops, the sun comes out. It's fabulous!" he says. The solar panels are designed to be applied directly to the flat roofs of the containers. "At this northern latitude (70 degrees N) there is no shortage of sunshine. In fact, we have more than 250 percent of the solar production capacity of Anaheim, Cal.," says Meares. The totally flat panels means the wind can't damage them and the snow melts off quickly.

He squeezes 350 watts of power from the operation, enough to run the shop lights, tools and a microwave oven plus recharge batteries for radios and computers. Meares says he has yet to change the batteries and is already working on plans to double the battery storage capacity for next season. He also plans to install more panels to increase power by another 400 watts. "I'm always trying to find cheap ways to do things," he says.



Inigok isn't on the map, but this remote airstrip is assuming increasing importance in support of oil exploration in the petroleum reserve.

Advisory Council welcomes two new members

2006 BLM Alaska RAC Meeting Schedule

(time, meeting location and public comment period to be announced)

February 7-8	Fairbanks
May 10-11	Juneau
August 2-4	South National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Field Trip
October 26-27	Anchorage

Department of the Interior Secretary Gale Norton appointed two new members and reappointed four members to the BLM Alaska Resource Advisory Council in September.

As new council members, longtime Alaska resident Barbara Fullmer brings her legal background in energy and mineral issues to the council, while Scott Hala represents dispersed recreation interests. Fullmer works as senior counsel for ConocoPhillips Alaska. Hala serves as vice president of the Alaska Outdoor Access Alliance.

The four reappointed members are Jim Posey, Charlie Boddy, Tom Crafford and Sandra Key.

The RAC has provided advice and recommendations to BLM Alaska on land withdrawals, public easements, wild and scenic rivers management, the Bering Glacier research camp and the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

BLM Alaska will be seeking nominations to fill the Elected Official vacancy. For the latest information check online at www.ak.blm.gov.

Each year one-third of the council seats become vacant. The BLM will call for nominations in spring 2006 for council members to represent commercial recreation and tourism, conservation and dispersed recreation, Alaska Native interests, and the public-at-large. For more information on the nomination process, contact Danielle Allen at (907) 271-3335 or email Danielle_Allen@ak.blm.gov

Frontier Flashes

Late-breaking news from around Alaska

Randy Goodwin

Summit Trail before (left) and after the thirty-year old boardwalk was replaced (right).

Summer on the Boardwalk

In August, the Eastern Interior Field Office sponsored a Serve Alaska Youth Corps (AmeriCorps) work crew that replaced 300 feet of boardwalk on the Summit hiking trail in the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

The seven-person crew tore up old boardwalk installed by the Youth Conservation Corps in the 1970s and replaced it with pressure-treated lumber. The SAYC crew also cut back thick alders and willows along one and a half miles of overgrown trail.

"This is a big, multi-year project," says outdoor recreation planner Randy Goodwin. "We have another 1,400 feet of boardwalk that still needs to be replaced. If we can get more crews as hard-working as this one, we'll make some real progress."

The non-motorized hiking trail is popular with backpackers and day-hikers in the summer, and is part of a five-mile ski trail in the winter.

Wainwright Wraps It Up

Olgoonik Corp., representing the Native village of Wainwright, received its remaining land entitlement of 6,500 acres on Oct. 18, making it the first village in the Arctic Slope region to receive its final entitlement.

Recordable Disclaimer Signed

BLM-Alaska State Director Henri Bisson signed a recordable disclaimer of interest for the Wood River and Lakes system near Bristol Bay. The disclaimer states the federal government has no valid interest to approximately 29 miles of riverbed and 107,840 acres of lakebed. This is BLM-Alaska's seventh RDI since 2003.

Bye-bye Beetles

The Anchorage Field Office awarded a Forest Stewardship contract to a local vendor to remove approximately 340 cords of beetle kill spruce from a 40-acre parcel of BLM-administered lands on the Kenai Peninsula. The lands are surrounded by rural residential subdivisions which could be threatened by wildland fire. Removing the dead trees reduces fire hazards and improves the health of the forest. Area residents strongly support the project.

Got Gas??

On Nov. 4, BLM reached agreement with Union Oil Co. of California (Unocal) for Swanson River Oilfield gas storage operations on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. The Swanson River field has been producing oil and gas since the late 1950s. The terms of the agreement were developed in coordination with the Kenai Refuge manager and are such that the gas storage operations will not require any additional surface disturbance and will not prolong the life of the field.

The terms of another agreement, also in the Swanson River Field, were amended on the same day to standardize the terms for both. The gas storage operations will allow Unocal to better meet seasonal swings in gas demand and lessen the chances that Southcentral Alaska will experience natural gas shortages in the high-use winter months.

Bowsers Bow Out

Volunteers Bob and Thelma Bowser have decided to call it quits after 14 consecutive summers of staffing the Yukon Crossing Visitor Contact Station on the Dalton Highway. The Orlando, Fla., couple said they wanted to try something new and spend summers closer to family.

Lenore Heppler

Central Yukon Field Office park ranger Lenore Heppler says the Bowsers' impact was huge. "It wasn't just that they were there for so many years sharing information on the Dalton Highway," said Heppler. "They also made an amazing amount of friends, not only among those who work along the highway but among visitors from all over the world."

In 1999 the Bowsers traveled to Washington, D.C., to receive BLM's national "Making a Difference" award for volunteers.

Tok TKO'd

The Fortymile Field Station in Tok shut its doors for good on Aug. 12. Two of the three remaining employees, realty technician Kevan Cooper and realty specialist Nancy Whicker, are now based out of the Fairbanks District Office. Outdoor recreation planner Jeff Kowalczyk took a job with the Anchorage Field Office. BLM activities in the Fortymile area will continue to be supported by summer facilities in Chicken and Eagle.

Fires 2005: another big year

Alaska's 2005 fire season in Alaska was the third largest since reliable records were first made in the 1950s. Historically, this is the first time that more than 2 million acres burned in two consecutive seasons. A wet spring, followed by hot, dry weather and lightning storms were major contributing factors.

"The Alaska Fire Service supported some 220 fires and did it safely with no loss of life or major injury. This is a tremendous accomplishment for any organization operating in a complex fire suppression environment," said AFS Manager Scott Billing.

Year	Acres burned
2004	6.59 million
1957	5.06 million
2005	4.5 million
1969	4.01 million
1990	3.18 million

Craig McCaa

A new world comes to Coldfoot. Staff at the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot report that visitors come in the door and are immediately drawn to the new globe. It was installed in July to replace a flat map. The globe, positioned at the entrance to the center's exhibits, is an effective tool for depicting Alaska and its position relative to the other lands of the high Arctic.

Arctic Center wins national award

The Arctic Interagency Visitor Center placed third in the National Media Awards presented at the National Association for Interpretation's National Interpreters' Workshop in Mobile, Ala., Nov. 10. "This award recognizes the good work of a team of BLM, NPS and FWS personnel who worked diligently on the project for more than five years. The center is a fine example of what can occur when people from a variety of backgrounds come together to pool their best," said BLM interpretive specialist Gene Ervine. There were fifteen submissions in the Visitor Center category this year.

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(information about projects or events affecting the Campbell Tract in Anchorage)

____ **Fireline**
(statewide wildfire information from the Alaska Fire Service, published twice a year)

Other information on:

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____ East Alaska Resource Management Plan
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Frontier Flashes

BLM seeks summer volunteers

Have you ever wanted to spend a summer experiencing a different part of Alaska? BLM-Alaska is accepting applications for volunteer campground hosts for a variety of locations in Alaska this summer, plus positions at two visitior centers along the Dalton Highway.

Whether lakeside along the Denali Highway, taking in the spectacular Alaska Range or exploring big views north of the Arctic Circle, this type of volunteering is an opportunity of a lifetime. You'll get a free campsite, and various expenses will be reimbursed.

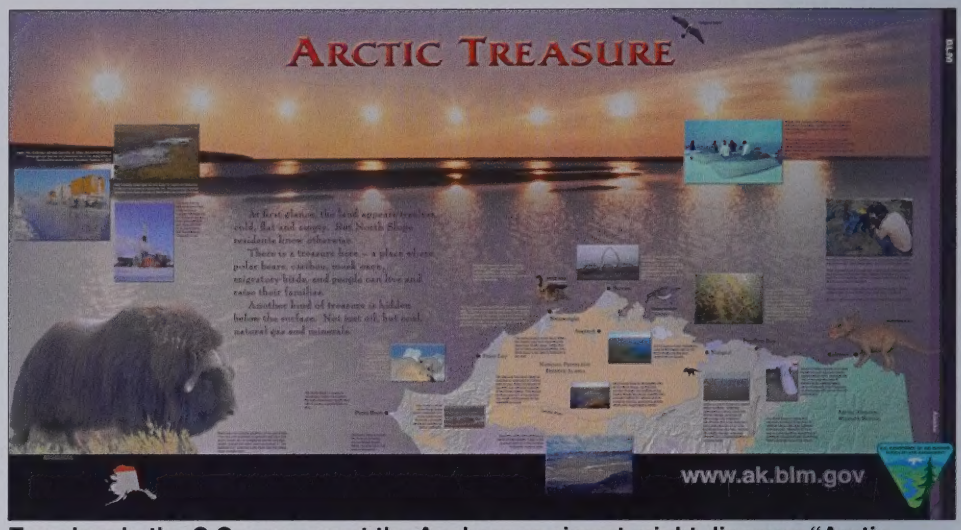
For more information contact, Marcia Butorac, Outdoor Recreation Planner, BLM Glennallen Field Office, P.O. Box 147, Glennallen, AK 99588, (907) 822-3217, Marcia_Butorac@ak.blm.gov) or Lisa Jodwallis, BLM Fairbanks District Office, 1150 University Avenue, Fairbanks, AK 99709, (907) 474-2339.

East Alaska Plan update

The East Alaska Proposed RMP/Final EIS will be available to the public by the end of March 2006. Currently the Draft RMP/EIS is being revised based on public comments and internal review. An Appendix to the final plan will include BLM's responses to public comments.

"The Stripe"

BLM is standardizing the look of its publications, including newsletters, brochures, business cards, CDs, and environmental impact statements. A key design element is a pair of bars, one of which contains the BLM acronym. BLM visual information specialists in the agency collaborated on developing the design which was approved by BLM national director Kathleen Clarke and the BLM senior management team. *BLM-Alaska Frontiers* debuts the new look with this issue. The standardized design element is intended to make the wide variety of BLM publications instantly recognizable by the public.



Vanessa Rathbun

Travelers in the C Concourse at the Anchorage airport might discover "Arctic Treasure." BLM-Alaska's latest display is filled with interesting facts about the natural resources found north of the Brooks Range. In mid-December the theme will switch to winter recreation opportunities on the public lands.

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